



WORDS: MONICA MORETTI

# A *dream* WEDDING FEAST



**W**HEN GETTING MARRIED abroad and selecting your wedding meal it's obviously really important that you get to taste it first', says Marion Hunter, owner of Dream Academy, an experienced travel consultant and wedding planner covering Lake Garda, the Veneto and Le Marche regions. 'It's vital that you know exactly what you are getting, which is why a sourcing tour is so important. It not only gives you the chance to sample the wedding food and wine but means that you get to meet your host. We've found that couples often want a second opinion so our tastings also include up to four other family members or friends.'

It is important for the husband and wife-to-be to consider the time and location of the reception but also just as essential is to try to consider using local dishes and specialities. These are dishes which have been tried and tested by the chef and so rather than have them try some of your own suggestions, which may not be the same as you get at home, Marion suggests opting for local produce and seasonal products which will give you more varied options. 'In Italy we don't eat huge red strawberries in December or any other products which are not fresh or in season' she explains, 'And as a nation that is very fussy about what it eats there has to be a good reason for that!'

**A VERY SPECIAL WEDDING DISH**  
Of course another reason why it's so important for the couple to try it all for themselves before the big day is that they are most likely going to be too excited and gazing into each other's eyes to notice what they are eating. 'It's a good idea to sit down and talk the menu through with your wedding planner and the chef,' says Marion. 'This is just as important as choosing the actual venue itself and time should always be set aside to do this. Remember Italy is renowned for the quality and freshness of its food and it's important that your wedding planner knows venues where only the best is served.'

Marion and her partner Franco discovered this at Villa Giona, a breathtaking 16th-century

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that here in this small village, expert *artigiani* continue to make a top-class tortellini. It seems that this pasta dish was created to celebrate the wedding of a rich nobleman and his lovely bride and for this reason they wanted a suitable shape to embrace the symbolic value of their union and what better than a 'lovers knot' made from pasta and filled with fine quality meat to further underline the importance of this very important and special event.

AN IMPORTANT WEDDING DISH

Tortellini plays an important part in any special meal in Italy and finds pride of place on all important tables from *Natale* to *Nozze*. 'This is why I offer tortellini to my treasured guests when they celebrate their weddings with us,' explains Paolo Saletti, owner and host of Villa Giona and whose warmth and professional hospitality permeate throughout.

'It is a very delicate dish with a savoury

meat filling, and as delicacy and quality produce are the main ingredients required to be worthy of a place in our restaurant it is therefore an ideal dish for us to serve.' The pasta must be very thin, as light as a 'bride's veil', and which takes only 45 – 55 seconds to cook in a tasty meat stock before they are fished from the broth and garnished. The pasta must be firm, even and filled with top quality beef which has been flavoured with salt, pepper, nutmeg, sage and a variety of other herbs and spices. The secrets of their success are jealously guarded by our master pasta-makers and handed down from mother to daughter. Paolo swears that the best-made tortellini come from the delicate touch of a *mano femminile* or female hand. It can, he says, be compared to *una bella donna* as it's a product to treat with *tanto amore* and every one is unique! ➤

mansion in the Veneto region. Top quality meats are slow-roasted using an amazing spit grill dating back to the 1700's. Selected cuts of hams and salamis '*sono fatti in casa*' (made at home), local cheeses which melt in your mouth and desserts to die for. They also make a very special wedding dish...

*I tortellini di Valeggio.*

Valeggio sul Mincio is a small village near Verona and close to where Villa Giona is situated. It dates back to the Renaissance period when it was dominated by the powerful Visconti family.

It is still not quite clear if the origins of this delicacy had its roots in the Emilia region or in Valeggio but what is clear even today is





'I ADORE SHARING THIS LITTLE CORNER OF PARADISE WITH OUR HAPPY COUPLES'

- The dressing of this gastronomic delight again just like Paolo's *bella donna*, must be delicate enough to enjoy the flavours of the filling. This is why the best results come from using a simple sauce made from good quality butter (if possible *malga d'alpeggio* because of its fragrant aroma) which is lightly melted with fresh sage and drizzled over the tortellini. A fine sprinkling of Parmigiano Reggiano is all that is then required to transform this dish into a truly divine and sensual offering.



swimming pool and 16 beautifully appointed rooms including a romantic bridal suite with four-poster bed situated in the tower. And all in the enviable position of being only a stone's throw from the historic city of Verona and the shores of Lake Garda.

'I adore sharing this little corner of paradise with our happy couples. I am sure that had Romeo and Juliet known that Villa Giona was right on their doorstep, their choice of wedding venue would have been right here!' [www.villagiona.it](http://www.villagiona.it) [www.dreamacademy.it](http://www.dreamacademy.it)

'*Tortellini di Valeggio con burro e salvia*' is a fitting prelude to the sumptuous wedding banquets served at the villa, accompanied of course by one of the excellent wines produced on the estate, which is home to some of Italy's finest wines. Amarone, Valpolicella and Villa Giona's own quality full bodied red wine. Grapes from the Villa Giona vineyard are also used to supply Allegrini, one of Italy's most prestigious wine producers.

Marion says 'At Dream Academy we are passionate about finding beautiful places, desire only top class hospitality and service, slow food and excellent wines and the minute I walked through the majestic gates of Villa Giona I just fell in love with the place as it has all this and much more: it's a place of peaceful tranquillity and stunning beauty nestling amidst vineyards and breathtaking scenery. Sparkling ornate fountains, lush Italian gardens, birdsong, a spacious

